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# Delivering Health and Wellness

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Traditionally, the primary association of milk and dairy foods in a nutrition and health discussion would be for health maintenance – calcium to build strong bones and vitamins to prevent diseases associated with nutrient deficiency. While this role of dairy foods is important, we now know that there are many other potential health benefits associated with milk and dairy foods consumption.

There continues to be a growing body of science that supports the idea that components of dairy foods may have a beneficial role to enhance immune function, modify body composition (more lean body mass), increase cognition, regulate inflammatory response, reduce hypertension, etc. In other words, our knowledge of the impact of dairy foods consumption continues to suggest they are important for individuals seeking optimal nutrition for health and wellness.

Hence, simply insuring and communicating that dairy foods are a good-to-excellent source of calcium and protein undervalues their contribution to a consumer's overall health and wellness goals. Dairy foods are one of the most important dietary sources of other essential nutrients such as potassium and that needs to be highlighted.

The oligosaccharides, phospholipids, bioactive peptides and other seemingly “minor” components of dairy foods need to be recognized as potentially significant contributors to specific health and wellness benefits in ways that consumers appreciate and processors can deliver.

As a result, consumers are being more proactive and looking for foods that can specifically deliver health and wellness benefits.

The first step is knowing the top health and wellness (functional) food trends and how dairy foods may be reinvented to fit these trends. Here are the top five trends and suggested “re-inventions.”

1. Consumers seek to make choices that are lower in fat, calories and sodium. Re-invention: Make dairy foods that taste good and are lower in fat, sodium and sugar.
2. Consumers want their health benefits using foods naturally high in nutrients. Re-invention: Quantify and communicate the full package of nutrients from dairy foods and dairy ingredients.
3. Consumers desire healthier snack options. Re-invention: Create new dairy foods that deliver the sensory profile and convenience that snackers crave.
4. Baby boomers are aging and seeking foods to address obesity, mental sharpness, sarcopenia, osteoporosis, cancer and

cardiovascular disease. Re-invention: Dairy foods for aging boomers should be customized with different flavors, packaging, nutrient profiles and marketing.

5. Consumers are concerned about additives, chemicals and preservatives in their food. Re-invention: Maintain and communicate the simplicity of the ingredient statements of most dairy foods and simplify those dairy food systems that are unnecessarily complex.

According to the Institute for the Future regarding the future of food, “People are turning to the broader marketplace - rather than just the traditional health care delivery system - for solutions to their health needs. The definition of healthy is expanding, and as we move toward a world of more healthy lifestyles, everything we eat and drink will be viewed through a health lens.”

This is really the perfect storm for the dairy industry. Consumers seeking health and wellness solutions through food, emerging scientific evidence of the health wellness benefits of a host of dairy components, and many “off-the-shelf” strategies that can be readily used to create dairy product solutions.

It is up to us to responsibly document the full benefits of dairy foods through good science; communicate these benefits to policy makers, the nutrition community, consumers and other health professionals; and allow food-product formulators/processors to offer these health and wellness benefits in a new generation of dairy foods.



*Phillip S. Tong, Ph.D., is Director, Dairy Products Technology Center, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, Calif. The assistance of Dr. Mary Ellen Sanders in the preparation of this column was useful and very much appreciated. Mention of commercial products is strictly informational and does not represent an endorsement.*